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What is Claimed is:

1. A variant of wild-type HIV-1 Tat protein which exhibits higher transcriptional activation and stronger P-TEFb binding than wild-type HIV-1 Tat.

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2. The variant of claim 1 comprising a mutation at position 23 of wild-type HIV-1 Tat.

10 3. The variant of claim 2 wherein the mutation at position 23 is a change from threonine to asparagine or another amino acid that results in higher activity.

15 4. A nucleic acid sequence encoding the variant of claim 1.

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5. A vector comprising the nucleic acid sequence of claim 4.

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6. A host cell comprising the vector of claim 5.

20 7. A method of inhibiting viral transcription in a cell comprising contacting the cells the variant of claim 1.

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8. A method of selectively activating cells latently infected with HIV comprising contacting the cells with the variant of claim 1.

30 9. An antibody raised against the variant of claim 1.

10. A vaccine comprising the antibody of claim 9.

35 11. A method for protecting an individual against HIV infection comprising administering to the individual

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the vaccine of claim 10.

12. A method of neutralizing pathogenic effects of HIV-1 Tat protein in an individual infected with HIV-1 comprising administering to the individual the vaccine of 5 claim 10.

13. A fusion protein comprising a selected protein fused to the variant of claim 1.

10 14. A method for facilitating uptake of a selected protein comprising fusing the selected protein to the variant of claim 1.

15 15. A tagged fusion construct comprising the variant of claim 1 fused to a tag for purification of the variant.

16. A defective HIV virus comprising the variant of claim 1 and a simian/human chimera virus.

20 17. A conditioned cell medium obtained from cells expressing the variant of claim 1.

25 18. A diagnostic assay for HIV infection comprising the conditioned medium of claim 17.

19. A kit for diagnosis of HIV infection comprising the conditioned medium of claim 17.